

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 PANAMA 04135 102306Z
ACTION SS-25

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FM AMEMBASSY PANAMA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7455

C O N F I D E N T I A L PANAMA 04135

STADIS//////////

EXDIS

E.O: 11652: GDS
TAGS: PDIP, SHUM, US, PN
SUBJECT: PRESIDENTIAL TRIP - HUMAN RIGHTS EVENT

REF: STATE 147775

1. BECAUSE OF PANAMA'S RELATIVELY GOOD (AND RECENTLY IMPROVED) RECORD ON HUMAN RIGHTS, IT HARDLY SEEMS APPROPRIATE TO UNDERLINE THE PROBLEM IN PANAMA AT THIS TIME. IT WOULD, OF COURSE, BE APPROPRIATE FOR PRESIDENT CARTER TO MENTION OUR CONTINUING CONCERN IN HIS TALKS WITH TORRIJOS.

2. IN FACT FEW PANAMANIAN -- EVEN IN THE OPPOSITION -- ARE EMPHASIZING THE "PURE" HUMAN RIGHTS QUESTIONS (POLITICAL PRISONERS; AND KILLINGS; TORTURE; FAIR TRIALS). THESE ARE HARDLY AN ISSUE HERE; POLITICAL RIGHTS ARE. PRESS CONTROL, THOUGH LESS BURDENSOME THAN A YEAR AGO, IS STILL PROTESTED HERE. BUT INCREASINGLY THE OPPOSITION'S CALL FOR A MORE DEMOCRATIC SYSTEM SEEMS TO BE IMPRESSING PANAMANIAN.

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 PANAMA 04135 102306Z

3. IN VIEW OF THIS, IT WOULD SEEM THAT IF AMBASSADOR TODMAN WOULD LIKE TO DISCUSS DOMESTIC PANAMANIAN QUESTIONS, HE SHOULD BROADEN THE AGENDA TO INCLUDE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL QUESTIONS (UNEMPLOYMENT, HOUSING, INVESTMENT, ETC.) AND POLITICAL QUESTIONS (THE EFFICACY OF THE SYSTEM OF CORREGIMIENTO REPRESENTATIVES, THE AUGUST ELECTIONS, ETC.),

AS WELL AS HUMAN RIGHTS.

4. AS FOR FORMAT, THERE WOULD SEEM TO BE TWO ALTERNATIVES. THE EMBASSY COULD HOST A MEETING, TO WHICH WE COULD INVITE APPROPRIATE PANAMANIAN; OR A SENSITIVE AND INDEPENDENT PANAMANIAN COULD BE ASKED TO GET TOGETHER AN INTERESTING AND REPRESENTATIVE GROUP. (WE HAVE IN MIND ARCHBISHOP MCGRATH.) IN EITHER CASE THE GUESTS SHOULD INCLUDE LABOR LEADERS, RELIGIOUS LEADERS, OPPOSITION POLITICIANS, BUSINESS LEADERS, ETC.

5. SUCH A MEETING SHOULD BE VERY INFORMAL, WITH NO MORE THAN A DOZEN OR SO ATTENDING. THE ARCHBISHOPRIC OR A HOME WOULD DO AS A SITE.

6. WE ARE NOT ENTHUSIASTIC ABOUT A MEETING WITH OPPOSITIONISTS ALONE AT THIS TIME. IT MIGHT SOUR THE PRESIDENT'S VISIT WITH TORRIJOS. THE ARRIVAL OF ARNULFO ARIAS TODAY AFTER A TEN-YEAR EXILE IS MAKING THE GOVERNMENT VERY JUMPY. THE TIMING IS JUST WRONG. JORDEN

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